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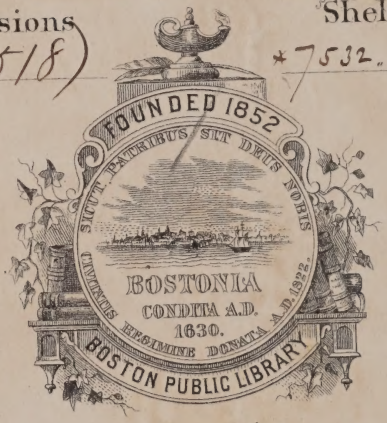

Received May 5, 1892.

JUL 8 1909
1918
MAY 6 A
MAR 26

The Relation of the Sunday School to the Church.

AN

ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE

THE STATE CONVENTION

OF

MASSACHUSETTS SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHERS,

AT WORCESTER, JUNE 13, 1860.

BY REV. F. D. HUNTINGTON, D. D.

BOSTON:
PUBLISHED BY HENRY HOYT,
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DISCOURSE.

THE Sunday School appears to take the character of an endless experiment. By the grandeur of its object, by the inexhaustible interests it touches, by the immortality of the souls it nourishes, as well as by the variety of conditions in which it exists, it is invested with this mystery and charm of an ever-unfinished enterprise. Its plan is never quite filled out. The hopes of its true-hearted friends run before their performance, and their aspirations are not realized. Its processes are all tentative. It works by an open pattern. A suspicion, which is probably wholesome, haunts us all that there is some secret about it not yet found out. An undertone of criticism, if not of complaint, can be heard in many of its reports. Greater things are felt to be in its possibilities than in its achievements; and the heart of every workman in it, that is worthy of his place, prophesies a future for it better than the past. Meantime, the consolation is that it is steadily striving to honor the Lord of the vineyard of whose spirit it sprang into life; and the

support of its servants is that it gathers its annual harvest, of such as shall be saved, into the life everlasting.

In this attitude of the institution, it seems reasonable for one who is attempting to speak for it, to suppose that he may serve it more effectually by confining himself to some single department of its manifold operation, especially if it be one that is thrown prominently forward by the exigencies of the hour,—than by any more general treatment. I am confirmed in this view by your executive officers, who have desired that our attention might be called, this morning, to the position and bearings held by the Sunday School, among the other regular appointments and activities of our Christian Religion.

What I have now to offer you, will take the track of this suggestion. The precise question to which the discussion will shape itself, is this: *What is the real relation of the Sunday School to the visible Church?*

Respecting such a relation, different theories are easily conceived. Is it, first, that of a friendly but quite independent co-operation; both the separate parties cherishing some neighborly sympathies, and interchanging some amicable offices, as occasions may allow; such a relation as subsists, for example, between a hospital and an academy, or a factory and a college, or two contiguous families, in the same town?

Or, secondly, is it that of a formal alliance between powers originally distinct, whereby the one agrees to

furnish a certain number of recruits, or a tariff of supplies, and a certain sort of aid and comfort, on stipulated terms, to the other: — the Sunday School sustaining the reputation for active usefulness and partly relieving the practical conscience of the Church, while the Church sends now and then a teacher for the Sunday School, or opens the building and gives way from the accustomed routine, of an afternoon, for its anniversary or quarterly exercises; such a kind of accommodating relation as may exist between a railroad corporation and a banking-house, or two adjacent colonies, or trading companies?

Or, thirdly, is it that of co-ordinate departments of some general and comprehensive organism, both rendering specific benefits to each other, both amenable to a common, central authority, and yet both constituted in separate systems, like the Post-office and the Navy in the administration of a National Government, or like the co-ordinate branches of a University?

In these three supposable sorts of connection there are, obviously, different degrees of intimacy and vitality. But none of them serves to express at all, according to the right conception of it, the nature of the bond between the Christian Sunday School and the Christian Church. That there is, very commonly, *as things now are*, no closer or deeper tie recognized than any of these is not denied. Indeed, it is that circumstance, existing as a fact, which gives occasion for some part of the inquiry on which this

address will venture. But is there not some closer and deeper tie in reality? That there is, and that the time is ripe for a positive affirmation of it, I, for one, believe with a fulness of conviction to which I shall hardly be able to give any adequate statement. But *if* there is, then, plainly enough, some immediate consequences, of no slight significance and magnitude, will grow from it, as respects the practical management of the institution; an institution so vast and so sacred that your great gathering, to-day, from all parts of the Commonwealth, is but a feeble symbol of your concern for it, while the fervent prayers you have already offered in its behalf, and will offer, are only a broken utterance of your veneration for it, and for the Lord and Saviour who hath sanctified it.

In order to approach what is most central and vital to the matter before us, we must meet three preliminary questions lying directly in the way: What is the Church? Who are the subjects of Sunday School influence and instruction? What is the result to which this Sunday School influence and instruction should propose to bring the pupils?

As to the Church, we need not, for the present, undertake any exhaustive definition, nor bring into view, perhaps, any doctrine that is seriously out of harmony with any Evangelical system. It is enough if we can agree, — as it may be supposed most of us can, — that the Church visible is the whole company of those persons, who, being

born of water and of the Spirit, and thus renewed by the washing of regeneration, are entered as living members into the Spiritual Body of Christ; persons who, being touched by the grace of the Spirit, and baptized into the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, have, through this second birth, both put on the Lord Jesus as their righteousness and received him into their hearts by faith, the old Adam being buried in them, and the new man raised up in them; so that thenceforth they are the Redeemer's people, partakers of all the promised blessings of the Divine Covenants, in this life and the life to come, just according to the measure of their faith; having his will for their supreme law, his love for the ruling principle of their life, and his blood of sacrifice for the only ground and hope of the remission of their sins; — who are thus "the congregation of faithful men, in which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments duly ministered according to Christ's ordinance," — "Members of Christ, children of God, and inheritors of the Kingdom of Heaven."

Let this stand for our common idea of the Church visible. Observe, I do not say that it includes definitively all that is important to a full declaration of ecclesiastical belief; and especially that I do not here overlook or underreckon the moment of the question whether the Church is a real *Body Incorporate* or only an *Association Aggregate*. There are profound matters germane to the

subject which the definition does not open. But it is sufficient, and convenient, for our use.

Secondly, on what human material does the Sunday School propose to operate? Socially, intellectually, and in respect of personal morality, its pupils represent every class in the community. But in respect of their Christian inheritance, and the religious expectations which may be reasonably formed upon them, they fall into two principal divisions: viz., those on the one hand that are the children of believing parents, or else are members in the Church by their own choice, and so, in either case, are children of the Christian Covenant, and those, on the other, that by negligence or unbelief are aliens from that covenant and strangers to that promise.

Of course, in their early age, with character not developed, with the Christian consciousness lying latent or only germinally alive, with the propensities of inborn depravity in many cases unsubdued, and with temptations to selfishness and thoughtlessness pressing on from every side, the *principal* work done for both these classes will be the same. Still, there will be an actual difference, in the motives addressed, in the susceptibility to be wrought upon, in the powers to work with. Besides these, there is, — let us thank the Saviour of the children for it, as I am sure we do, — there is a third class, of those pupils that are manifestly joined to the Lord not only by ordinances, but by a personal adoption of his gift and an inward ex-

perience of his grace,— children having the seal manifest in their foreheads, early called and early chosen, conscious of their spiritual relationship, holy before the world has had time to harden them, and saying, with the whole reverent and lovely posture of their piety, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth."

So, thirdly, we find the means of seeing what the Sunday School has it for its sacred business to do. It is to produce, to nourish, or to perfect, in the pupil, a personal and conscious relation to Christ: a relation of obedience, of trust, of sympathy, of affection, of loyalty; nay, of inward membership and participation, so that the life of the Head shall be the life of the member; and the young disciple be able to say, "It is no more I that live, but Christ liveth in me." In the method of effecting this grand object, there will necessarily be some variation, corresponding to the various states in which the scholars are found with reference to "Christ the Head" already, whether as acknowledged heirs of his blessing in holy baptism, or as in actual communion with him by the confession of the mouth, and partakers of the body and blood, or as the uncovenanted objects of his compassion and of Christian men's concern. But, in all, the great end sought will be identical, and so the old familiar themes will be the same, Biblical, and therefore unchangeable. If you speak of the Christian consciousness, either its germ must be planted in the child, or its incipient energy be un-

folded and strengthened, or its confirmed exercise be daily increased in the Holy Spirit more and more, until he come into the Everlasting Kingdom. If you speak of personal conversion, it must be begun, continued, or ended, as the individual case may require; but, at any rate, and in all cases, conversion there must be. If you speak of the principled resistance to all the depraved passions and propensities of the natural heart, and of the victory, your pupil must be summoned to these, just according to his weakness and his need, by every ringing appeal of the Gospel, and every promise and terror of the world to come.

This, my friends, who are Sunday School teachers and officers, this, do not let me scruple to say it, and do not dare to say less for yourselves, — this is your high calling. Nothing less is the main object; nothing less is the end; not to while away an unoccupied hour or two of sacred time; not to come in and make up reputably for the domestic deficiencies of negligent or unprincipled parents; not to generate a vestry atmosphere of general social exhilaration; not to convey lessons in natural religion, scriptural geography, or pious fiction, by all the apparatus of tuition, maps, specimens, lectures and libraries; though every one of these things may claim a lawful and honorable place in the scope of your large labor, because all of them may be tributary to your loftier aim. But primarily, specifically, supremely, first and last, by tuition and example, by knowledge and love, by lessons and looks, by books

and song, by private counsel and prayer, through whatever instrumentality, by whatever apparatus, your privileged and blessed office is to bring the young souls committed to your charge, renewed and redeemed, unto Christ, your Saviour and theirs, that they may appear with him in the day of his appearing. And assuredly that day is coming, when you will wish this, and only this, to have been your steadfast endeavor.

But now, wherein, except in the gift and grace of sacraments, does this differ from the peculiar and divinely appointed office of Christ's church? Could you easily find terms more explicitly to set forth the distinctive business of Christ's schooling and working body in the world? Save as the recipients are commonly of youthful age, wherein does it depart from the express and recognized functions of the ministry of the Word?

This being so, it seems to me we have already, and without looking further for it, an answer to the question what the Sunday School is. It is a nursery for the Church, first visible, and then invisible; a nursery of souls born in a Christian land, many of them born under the Christian promise, all of them born for the express purpose of becoming Christians in life and through ordinances, — in the heart by faith, and in outward fellowship by confession; born once to be born again, — to be baptized, and to be brought thus, or to come, under the ancient and everlasting covenant; to be taught, educated, i. e. "drawn out," as to

all the forces and activities of Christian living, in a Christian childhood, a Christian youth, a Christian manhood or womanhood, complete and consecrate, and thus fitted to be gifted and empowered from on high with all the fulness of the measure of the stature of Christ.

Repeated use has been made of the term "covenant." Under that term lies a religious idea which is of the most efficient significance to this discussion. I might go further, and say it is an idea intensely vital to our whole Christian estate. The entire body of scriptural revelations is alive with its life. The august succession of supernatural disclosures, from Eden to Patmos, is a perpetual proposal, remembering, renewing, fulfilling of covenant promises. To an extent quite unthought of by many minds, it is this covenant character which distinguishes our Biblical or Christian, — for I consider the terms Biblical and Christian to be essentially interchangeable, Christ being properly the subject of the whole Book, the Old Testament as truly a part of the mediatorial manifestation as the New, and Isaiah, whom Jerome calls the "Evangelist of the Prophets," not being alone in evangelical inspiration, — it is this covenant character, I say, which distinguishes the Biblical or Christian faith from every ethnic religion. It inheres in every member of the Sacred Canon, and it welds and fastens every link of the theocratic line, — Abrahamic, Mosaic, Messiahnic. The covenants come out in the Patriarchy; they are re-affirmed

in the Law, ever fronting and awing both the constitutional and the monarchical periods of the Judean commonwealth; they bind and perpetuate the benignant securities of the Gospel. First, the national Hebrew Church, and then the Catholic Church of Christ, is not only founded, but rooted in them,—the interlacing, radical fibres of both thus holding the two structures inseparably in one, each be-being a tree and temple together, or, as St. Paul so boldly images it, the temple that is a tree and grows,—architecture with organic life in it,—as if the sap of these June leaves and branches about us were to leap and throb in the rising columns and along the live arches of some marble cathedral. It is the power of covenants that underlies with strength and brightens with beauty every ecclesiastical ordinance and every paternal message of the elder and later economy. In the sabbatic rest of the seventh day, they crown the work of creation with the gracious appointment from which the institution that has now called us together takes its very name and the time and opportunity of its benefaction. In the promise of "the Seed of the woman," they offer with immediate mercy, the remedy and redemptive consolation of the Fall. In the bow that overhangs the receding waters of the Flood, they pledge the God who is the "father of the rain," who maketh vapors to disperse the over-fulness of the sea, and balances the clouds, and holds the ocean in the hollow of his hand, never again to let the circuit of the waters be broken.

At Bethel, Mahanaim and Peniel, in the Patriarch's tents, they guarantee the ancient and everlasting blessing to all nations through the chosen Seed, for "he saith 'and to thy Seed,' which is Christ." In Melchizedec, that brilliant and mystic figure on the oriental scenes, they typify the blending of the royal and sacerdotal offices in the King and Priest, who was to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. At Jacob's death-bed they foretell the "Shiloh" that shall pacify the world and propitiate the justice of Heaven. At Horeb and Sinai they reach back to the beginning and forward to the end, connect Mamre with Calvary, and show the Jehovah of Israel in the later Prophet that the Lord God shall raise up. They are written out in the statutes. They are engraven on the tables of stone. They ordain and embellish the Ritual. They trace the imagery of the priestly splendors, fashion the breast-plate and the mitre, shape the tabernacle, spread the wings of the cherubim, and shine in the illumination of the Shekinah. They are in the pillar and cloud of the march through the wilderness. They create memories of peace and of tears at Elim and Bochim. They fix monuments in the geographic features of the landscape,—Ebal and Gerizim, Jordan and the well of Samaria, Zion, Carmel, Moriah, and Tabor. Nay, the very country itself is known as the "Land of Promise." All the historical ages are but living illustrations of the two-fold operation of God's covenant government. Prosperity is granted under a bond. The judg-

ments that follow the violation of the law, — banishment from Paradise, the deluge, Babel confusion, bondage in Egypt, wanderings in the wilderness, the law-giver's dying on the borders of Canaan, the divisions, captivities and disasters of the tribes, — all these are but the disciplinary examples of a covenant-keeping God, who runs penalty parallel with blessing, and even makes penalty an element of the covenant-blessing itself,—"Thus saith the Lord," for the righteous and the wicked alike being the security of that "justice and judgment" which are the "habitation of his throne."

Indeed, we seem well nigh to have forgotten that our name "Testament," Old or New, derived from the διαθήκη of 2 Cor. iii 14, is but the name of the very idea before us, — *testamentum* being the Latin or vulgate version of the word, and, as denoting the whole religious economy and doctrine of the Israelites, applied to that holy volume from which our blessed Lord himself was willing to read at the opening of his public ministry at Nazareth and to preach, in a Jewish synagogue, the "gracious words" of his "Gospel to the poor," the broken-hearted, the captives, the blind, the bruised. It seems to me we find cause for a growing conviction that the present disorders of our religious state are not to be cured, nor the tendencies to rationalistic unbelief to be met, except by a more complete recognition of this unity of the Bible, God's Book of Life for us, — a unity of divine plan and thought, a unity of

subject and doctrine, a unity of spirit and form, embracing every part, comprehending every detail, combining and harmonizing every apparently inharmonious element or text, just as the unity of the architect's design first contemplates, then includes, and then manages every minutest decoration, or handful of mortar, or hidden brace, in the symmetry and steadiness of the building. Our later naturalists tell us that it is a matter of clear and decisive scientific demonstration that when God created the lowest and rudest form of organized life, he expressly contemplated and foresaw the loftiest and most perfect; so that in the very structure of the polyp, man, immortal man, the man whom Shakspeare himself, the measure and type of so many of man's capabilities, calls "the paragon of animals and the beauty of the world," was distinctly in the Creator's design. The more I study the Bible, the more it rises before me as a creation, a kind of revelatory universe, in itself; and with a greater than the scientific confidence just mentioned we can say of it that when the first sentence of Genesis was inspired and written, the visions of the Apocalypse, with the call to the second advent, "Come Lord Jesus," were in explicit preparation. The salvation of a world with its ages and its millions justifies no less a faith than this. When "the first man Adam was made a living soul," the "last Adam," "a quickening Spirit," "the Lord from Heaven," was making ready to be "manifest in the flesh." Indeed, how luminous is the

fact that the very designation by which we know the "volume of the Book," which is the "Word," is a chief title of Him also who, having been "in the beginning with God, was God," and in these last days, as our Emmanuel, is "manifest in the flesh, preached unto the nations, believed on in the world, received up into glory." Here, unquestionably, is the grand unity of the Bible,—in the person of Christ, who is at once its theme and its inspiration, the central figure to which every eye looks and every hand points, the Messiah of the Old and the New, of Patriarchy and Prophecy, of Gospel and Epistle, of history and proverb, and apologue and song, whom the goodly fellowship of the Prophets predict, whom the glorious company of the Apostles preach, to whom the noble army of martyrs witness, and whom all forever, in the unity of their heavenly worship, praise. For, it is not too much to say, in completion of this reference to the doctrine of covenants, which is so vital to the Church and its ordinances, as it has been said in general, that "the hopes of all mankind with regard to conversion, from the wreck of Paradise lost to the prophetic vision of Paradise restored, are fixed on this mysterious Son of Man. On Him, as the Seed of the woman who should bruise the serpent's head; as the Lord whose future coming cheered the saintly Enoch; as the living Redeemer on whom the patriarch Job rested his hopes of immortality; as the son of Abraham, a benefactor in whom all the families of the earth should be blessed;

as the Shiloh of Jacob's dying-bed; as the angel of the burning bush and the fiery pillar; as the Captain who fought for Israel and nerved the arms of her warriors; as the Begotten Son of God, the assessor of his throne, the Prince forever, predicted by the "sweet Psalmist of Israel;" as the "Wisdom" of the Proverbs who was with the Father in the beginning of his way as one brought up with him, his daily delight; "as the virgin-born Emmanuel, foretold by Isaiah," when he saw his glory and spake of him, "Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Father of an everlasting age, the Prince of Peace; as the Lord our Righteousness anticipated by Jeremiah; as the appearance of a man on the sapphire throne seen in vision by Ezekiel; as the Messiah announced to Daniel, "who should be cut off, but not for himself;" as the Fountain opened, the victim pierced, and the lowly King, seen by Zechariah; "as the Desire of all nations of whom Haggai wrote; and as the Sun of Righteousness, beheld afar by Malachi, who would rise on the world with healing in his wings, — on Him, from age to age, the faith of every believer has fastened, by prophecy and by promise." In short, the real connection of the earlier and later covenants can never be better expressed than in the old Latin aphorism, which, in the literal beauty of the antithesis, admits no adequate translation: "In novo Testamento vetus patet; in vetere novum latet;" but which

may be clumsily rendered, "In the New Testament the Old shines manifest; in the Old, the New lies waiting."

Now, my friends, this view has a direct application to the great interest under our study. The truth here shown has in it a power to put a new aspect on all the relations of the Church to her children; to encourage us as parents of an immortal and tempted offspring; to reassure every disheartened teacher, saddened over his seemingly profitless instruction, and so to reanimate and strengthen the entire Sunday School operation. Its pupils, these children, are born into the heritage of such everlasting and unfailing promises. Circumcision, the sign of relation to the Hebrew church, has a lawful and hereditary successor in the baptism of the Christian church. Our God will keep all his promises, to them and to us, as surely as we, in our behalf and theirs, keep on covenant terms with Him. His blessings flow through the channels appointed and declared. Separate the Sunday School from the Church and you break it from the parent stem; you sunder the vital, vascular cord; you cut it off from the most sacred and nutritious juices that flow up and into it from the old Bible stock. "Thou bearest not the root, but the root thee." In other words, the Sunday School wants to be kept in organic relations with historical Christianity; as an offshoot of that ancestral, divinely planted tree.

If the time allowed us to look further into the branchings out of this doctrine, I apprehend that we should discover

that it has as much to do with the defects, the slowness, the coldness and the crudity of the average piety of our community as it has with the right workings of any particular department of Christian philanthropy. An enormous proportion of Christians, young and old, are haunted and distressed by unsatisfied aspirations. Constant complaints are made, as every pastor knows, or ought to know, not only that little actual satisfaction in spiritual living is gained, — which, in the boundlessness of religion, is inevitable, — but that those reasonable degrees of peace are not attained which are represented as the disciple's testimony and criterion if not his reward. The bottom of this difficulty is that we are all too unmindful of God's promises. There is not enough preaching of the promises, not enough teaching of the promises to our children, not enough praying by the promises, — petition for pledge, and word for word, — not enough living on the promises. So our religion gets dry, hard, unlovely, because faithless. We do not trust Christ in his plainest declarations. We are not willing to take him at his word. We question, we analyze, we inspect our own performances, count them up, weigh them out, bend our necks to gaze at our own constitutions, like the Eastern dervishes; we wonder how far we have got, perhaps go back to see, sink into a morbid introspection, and are extensively out of health. We are legalists, and not freemen of grace. We are in bondage to the letter, and not at liberty in the spirit. We Chris-

tians go sad to our daily duty, as Froissart said of the English, "They take their pleasure sadly, after the manner of their nation." There is a lack of cheeriness and heartiness in such piety; a lack of that "joy of believing" which makes believing attractive, and recommends the Gospel to young hearts. Children ought to see a serener and happier look on the face of the Church. The saints should worry less, and sing more. The assurance of faith was meant to be more than a phrase of rhetorical unction; it was meant to be the normal and common state of good men and women.

"Dole not thy duties out to God,
But let thy hand be free:
Look long at Jesus; his sweet blood,
How was it dealt to thee?"

What a difference between the proper and sacred cheerfulness thus imported into the companies of the young, and those mixed devices, half story-book and half theatre, which are so often resorted to, to "keep up the interest," or to while away the tedious monotony of the classes!

Place with this dignifying influence of the promises the great power of institutions. An effectual answer to those who, as so many now-a-days do, exaggerate the valuable notions of individuality, freedom, and independence, who would take everything to pieces, and at once disorganize ecclesiastical governments and vulgarize the holy sacra-

ments in a false reliance on spontaneous energies, is simply to recur to the natural and historical proofs of the Providential purpose of instituted truth. It will be wise for devotees of the superficial maxim, that everybody who happens to have a sincere intention should do his own good in his own way, to reflect on the beneficent results of the organizing and instituting force which it has pleased the Author of things to join with the most vital ideas; putting a body upon life; clothing entities with forms; treasuring up wisdom or goodness in receptacles, in constitutions, rites, ceremonies, and so handing them silently and gracefully over from generation to generation. Now this is a leading attribute of the Church, the oldest, the largest, the mightiest, as well as the holiest of institutions, and the keeper and guaranty of so many besides itself in the system of civilization. Accordingly, the closer we draw the Sunday School under its protection, the more certainly we shall establish its efficiency. Amidst all the causes of uncertainty and confusion that are rife in a democratic air, we shall do well to join on this department of Christian activity upon the Past, or rather to prevent its ceasing to be fruitful by its getting severed from these springs of historic invigoration.

Having thus adverted to some of those primary facts and reasons which really lay a deep foundation for the

principal position here taken, I find it is time to meet the inquiry, How this connection between the Sunday School and the Church is to appear, and to be made practically useful.

In the first place, it will exert a great practical influence over them both, simply to acknowledge, cordially, the fact that such a connection exists. No truth of this nature can be confessed in the soul without sending out unconscious effects into conduct, gradually embodying itself in measures, moulding methods, toning speech, and leading on to specific reforms as occasions arise. In this case, the younger of the two institutions will assume a more reverential attitude, and do a more earnest work, for a mere subjective sense of its high relationship; while the Church, under a corresponding consciousness, will more zealously watch and more thoughtfully help this child of its loins and of its prayers.

Secondly, it becomes the office of the Church and the Sunday School both, by virtue of their kinship, to hold up and instill a correct theory of their common origin and common privilege. The scholars are to be taught not only the strictly individual duties of morality and piety, with whatever appertains to the external apparatus of an elementary knowledge of the Scriptures, but distinctly and emphatically the principles and laws of their incorporate Christian existence and their historical endowment. They are to be taught what the Church is, what they owe

to it, what it is to be members of it. They are to be taught to look to a voluntary and personal connection with it as the consummation of their social birthright; and that all their advantages and opportunities are mournfully incomplete without it. The Church, on her part, is to see to it that this tuition is given; to open every facility; to choose out and appoint the teachers, choosing carefully and appointing authoritatively, no matter if with some simple but solemn ceremony of dedication to that sacred vocation; she is to use vigilance over all that is said and done for the susceptible souls given her in trust; she is to hold the teachers responsible, and is to provide, in a generous spirit, every needed assistance, sympathy, and encouragement, to their always difficult, always delicate, always laborious, but never wasted industry. Above all she is to aid them by her social and her secret prayers, prevailing thus with the Almighty Head.

Thirdly, as there is unity under the Head, so there ought to be unity under the representative of the Head. The minister, where there is a minister, as the official ambassador of his Lord, and president of the visible, local body in its active religious capacity, must personally and directly oversee the concerns of the school. If he is not the nominal Superintendent, the Superintendent will be his deputy, and friendly agent, entering into his wishes, and executing his plans. In most cases, perhaps, the rules of adaptation, or a division of labor, will assign some

second person to this trust. But this should in no instance incline the Pastor, who is, by his office, Superintendent of every Parish School, to abdicate his post, and so to sever himself from this blessed intimacy with the children of his flock. He is fit for it if he is fit for any clerical function; and it will be a bad economy that shall instigate him to abjure it for the sake of any other care or work whatever. Through the Teachers' meetings he may also exert the direct impression of his ministry, in the most effectual way, as a director both of doctrine and of measures.

If you have followed this train of remark thus far, it will be for you to judge, out of your experience in the actual working of the system, whether some of the difficulties and hindrances to which the Sunday School is liable might not be in some measure forestalled by a more thorough and consistent realization of the views here proposed. Some of these defects will be acknowledged, I suppose, by most minds practically conversant with the system, to be such as the following: — the difficulty in obtaining teachers that are both intellectually and spiritually competent; the absence of a uniform law, or discipline of order; the latitude of topics taken in instruction; the tendency to resort to adventitious and unreligious attractions; the propensity of the older scholars to fall off from the school; and especially the want of any such palpable, objective result of the whole course on the pupil, as to set

him at the close into a position of spiritual permanency and tolerable security.

In one or another of the bearings of the discussion now on hand, some remedy will be found for each of these drawbacks. Where the drawbacks exist in least force, that is, where the Sunday is most righteously prosperous and satisfactory, there it will be found that the general management is most in accordance with the theory that binds the Sunday School and the Church bodies closely together.

It will best suit my purpose, however, to offer the advantages of this view, as to its legitimate effects, in a positive form; and this will be my endeavor in conclusion.

1. First, then, the practical effect of the doctrine will be to *determine beneficially the character of the Sunday School teachers.* That so large an amount of intelligence and sincerity, and so noble an army of strong and faithful men and women, should be already enlisted as we now see in the field, is what might have been expected from the general culture, good-sense and good-faith of our New England Christianity. It would be enough to crown the institution with immortal honor to have only discovered and developed so goodly a fellowship as is here found at this moment, keeping jubilee, refreshing its energies, and rekindling its faith both in the work and in the work's Master; — the religious heart of the Commonwealth beat-

ing gratefully and devoutly in its geographic heart, the teachers taught of each other, and all taught together of the Holy Pentecostal Spirit. Nevertheless, instances are not wanting where the ranks are thin, and where the school languishes, for lack of instructors who join discretion with piety; others occur, where a laudable disposition to do good in some way, or the amiable consent to an unwise urgency, has been the motive to enlistment rather than the love of souls or the love of Christ; others still, where the teachers themselves, by youth or inexperience, are conscious that they need rather to be learners than preceptors. In a just order of things, each Church would consider itself pledged by its very name to furnish a full staff of teachers from its best and most disciplined members, and, if these could not be otherwise provided, the church-members must turn to and go to some Christian school themselves; would hold that to be as much a part of its constant trust as to secure a Pastor and ordinances; would always put spiritual attainment foremost in the list of qualifications; would sympathize with the Teachers' purposes, share their hardships, listen to their reports and requests, and show a personal thankfulness for their fidelity to the saving truths of their vocation. Any person of no more than ordinary intelligence, judgment, or assurance, who has a vital experience of these truths, is fit to be a Sunday-school teacher. Attainments may be few; misgivings about personal desert many; the new life may not

have been long burning in the teacher's own breast. Still, if such as these are the conscious and controlling convictions, then their possesor is wanted for the work. Christ calls him to it. He ought to leave much, if necessary, to go to it. Diffidence itself will not dare to make an obstinate refusal. The Father's love in the breast tells its own secret, in whispers never so quiet, yet clear as the voice of thunder in the sky. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned; and whoso has tasted the good word of God, and been made a partaker of the heavenly gift, and who knows verily that he and God are at one in Christ, is the appointed servant, to take the tender heart of childhood and bear it into the fold of the Shepherd, laying the lambs in his bosom.

2. A second effect will be to *determine*, in the same way, *the matter and subjects of the instruction*, keeping them strictly scriptural and religious, holding them to the central and fundamental things of Christian faith and righteousness, with the sanctified virtues that spring, in daily life, out of that soil, excluding all intermeddlings with secular knowledge, save as that is directly included in the wide range of Biblical study and the soul's relation to God; remembering that the brain, in these days, is not likely to fail of its due, nor literary ambition to lose stimulus, under the pressure of our social competitions and admirations. Our tempted and imperilled children do not need, in the brief hour of their sacred opportunity, juvenile

dilutions of the classics, nor weak decoctions of the natural science which the day-school gives in stronger and better preparations. How loose is the frequent practice! Out of the wide universe of being some topic, more or less fit, is arbitrarily selected, and general lesson, class exercise, Scripture reading, hymn, private exhortation, geography of Palestine, beatitudes, St. Paul's epistles, the parable of the talents, Naaman's leprosy, the beauty of a butterfly, Joseph and his brethren, Noah's ark, the forgiveness of sins, the shape of Solomon's temple, the prismatic colors, Daniel in the den of lions, and the last Panorama, enter into a mixture that deposits a residuum of neither faith nor works. The result is, in not a few cases, that the youth leaves the Sunday School, and not without alacrity, as destitute of any connected ideas of the subject as he came in half a dozen years before. To make confusion a little worse confounded, an exceedingly miscellaneous Library, ranging, with a most gentile catholicity, from Lalla Rookh to Pilgrim's Progress, and from Baxter's Saint's Rest to Martin Merrivale, is projected into the midst of the service, dividing if not ruining the attention, and possibly scattering the good impression some faithful teacher has managed to create. Where shall we look for the higher nurture, the quickening of the spiritual discernment, and the kindling of the love which abideth when tongues shall cease and knowledge shall vanish away, and is the very crown and glory of the head of learning, if not to the church, the di-

vine custodian of the heavenly mysteries? The vast extent, the inexhaustible variety, the fascinating wonders, of the study of the Bible alone, as the study is yet to be unfolded, have only begun to be conceived. Had the Greeks, or the Egyptians, or the Hindoos, or the Scandinavians, possessed manuals of their mythologies, corresponding to what the Bible is to Christianity, and as obtainable, they would have made our cheeks blush with the shame of Christian carelessness. They would have counted a neglect to initiate their youths into these sacred books a ghastly profanation disgraceful to Paganism. An examination of the children in some of our Sunday Schools would disclose an ignorance respecting the contents, the origin, the characteristics, the special design and adaptation, and even the arrangement of the several compositions in the Biblical collection, in the face of which we should hardly dare to reaffirm that the Bible is, in any sense whatever, the religion of Protestants.

3. Thirdly, *there would be brought into play*, at the same time, *influences so congenial and so enlivening, in their operation upon childhood, as would prove more than a compensation for any pleasures imported from the playgrounds of the world.* Underneath all moods of heart and mind runs the empire of law. It is a law of the affections of the young that they fasten on the friends that heartily and thoughtfully love them. That theory, then, which most makes them feel that they are precious and cared for,

held in the Church's arms, and blessed by her holy benediction as *her own* children, will be sure to yield, as, in point of fact, it does yield, the return from them of trust, of loyalty, of joy, of enthusiasm. Deep down in their better life it will plant this gracious sentiment. The difference between the tawdry and shallow amusements with which Sunday School managers have been sometimes known to travesty their vocation, and these purer and sweeter entertainments provided by reverence and quiet kindness, will be just the difference between the parental affection that runs to indiscriminate indulgence, and that which is rooted in principle and tempered with a thoughtful conscience. It is the difference between fondness and love. And even children that clamor, through the old Adam that is in them, for the fondness, are yet gifted with some dim instinct that despises it, and longs for a love that is worthier of the name.

4. But, again, fourthly, *the whole view, embraced together, will take the formation of a religious character out of the realm of artificial and exceptional experiences, to set it, where by divine right it belongs, into the order of regular, internal, expected processes, or growths, under the Holy Spirit,* The Christian is not only the highest style of man, but the designed style of man, and is in the best, the only true, the joyful condition, for every man, and every woman, and every boy, and every girl, to be in, and breathe in. Nor does this in the least

militate against any orthodox doctrine of conversion, as I trust we have seen already. The conversion stands, a necessary fact. Surely we do not under-prize or contradict it, by claiming that it should be the common boon, and by creating for it an expectation in all our conceptions and arrangements touching our children's education. What I contend for is, that instead of educating them for a while on a manifest presumption that they are not to be converted and Christianized, but only drilled and enticed into the information and the politeness of accomplished little Pagans, and then, after a time, in a fortunate state of the atmosphere, or under some charm, be transformed, — or miss it, as may be, — we should deal better with them by telling them that Christ, in his church, has laid his hands upon them, and laid claim to them, that the Holy Ghost is already at the door of their hearts, and that they should grow under his transforming and renewing touch, day by day, in the purity, and wisdom, and gentleness, and sanctity, of the very life of God in their souls.

5. A fifth effect will be *to clothe the Sunday School, as an economy of discipline and tuition, with authority,* — an authority which it confessedly and in some places lamentably requires. To a considerable extent, a Sunday School presents the anomaly of a school without a master, a government without a control, an organization without a conservative force. We see a mortifying contrast between the chaos and listlessness of the Sunday seminary and the

decision and energy of the public and private week-day education. Going from the Saturday to the Sunday School is sometimes like going from one of the Lowell mills to an Onondaga wigwam, or from one of Field Marshal Wellington's battalion drills to a political caucus. The pretended disciplinarian stands before his class a pitiable embodiment of supplicating imbecility, while truancy, tardiness, and other lively demonstrations of insubordination, put his patience to its perfect work. All this is worse than nothing. Reverence is the root-sentiment of religion, and where that is systematically undermined by the lax habits of the room, no pious sentimentalism is a compensation. It is true there may be the check on disorder imposed by a certain sense of propriety. In some teachers there is the element that secures decorum by respect, and in more, it is to be hoped, there is that empire of the affections which, when rightly upheld by Christian dignity, matches the stringency of formal rule, and is the most beautiful royalty in the world. But this is apt to imply gifts and graces, of person and manner as well as the heart, by no means to be universally looked for in the earnest and Christian persons that still have a true call to teach. The pupils, then, need to feel that there is pressing down over them, tenderly, invisibly, but very firmly, the whole moral authority of the Church, — an authority that is more than personal, and is coercive only by its weight. They should understand that the mutual confi-

dence between their teachers and their parents is so strong that the control of the former will be sustained by the latter, and that no appeal taken from the one to the other will be likely to avail to the reversal of any wholesome correction. They should see that their teacher comes to them in the name, at the command, and for the dear sake, of the majestic and revered reality, the visible Body of Christ, which has been from the beginning,—concentrating its solemnities in a front of power. They should fear to offend him as they fear to profane the house of God's worship. And they *will* feel this, in proportion as they see clearly that the teacher has a great gift to impart to them, an ardent desire to confer it, and a hallowed commission which writes out its warrant in all his manners and his looks. They know the quality of their tuition. They read human pages quickly. They can tell when they are put off with pleasant rubbish, and when the teacher follows his orders and is bold and vigilant for his Lord, and they will obey the mastery in which that Master speaks.

6. Nor ought it to be overlooked, as an incidental justification of our doctrine, that *it carries with it a scriptural and profound interpretation of the rite of baptism*, exalting it to the true place our Saviour assigned it, when he declared the birth of water and of the Spirit essential to admission into the Kingdom of Heaven. Here, in the sign and the thing signified, is the true covenant of Christian grace. Here is the renewal and repledging of the

spirit of all the covenants that have brightened the weary pathway of God's people. Here is the blessed comfort of Christian parents. Here is the outer symbol, and a veritable means, of the inward and mystical washing away of sin through the Holy Ghost, by the God who keeps his promises according to the terms of their conditions. And if this be so, then there is already guaranteed a relation of some holy and significant sort between the children of the covenant and the Church through which the covenant is made effectual and sure. What less can the agency be, which trains these children for the duties of their Christian home, and the privileges of their free citizenship in the Kingdom of Heaven, than the living instrument of the Church herself? And then if the same agency is to go out to bring in, to save, and to lead to the font and the altar, those that have lost their portion by parental unbelief, who, in the name of that Gospel which knows neither circumcised nor uncircumcised, bond nor free, in the impartial and infinite sweep of its *offers*, — who shall send it, but the Church by which the Gospel ever preaches to the world?

7. Immediately growing out of this advantage is another, — that *a vital and, as it seems to me, a very attractive character is put upon Church membership.* Steadily, and cheerily, with tones of invitation and a countenance of hope, the Sunday School directs its pupils from the baptism to the table of communion. Each one of them

has not to live out in the cold night-air, but in the warmth and fellowship of the happy and the good. He has not to fight his solitary battle, faint with home-sickness in his heart, but in the midst of the sacramental host, under the Leader's eye, with the inspiration of the whole Church militant in all the uplifting confidence of a promised triumph within him.

Nor is this less to Christian parents than to their heirs. Many a mother knows, — and it is certainly to be hoped there are some mothers among the Sunday School teachers of Massachusetts, — the sensation that comes when her young child turns upon her the look of an earnest expectancy, and asks that awful question "Mother, am I a Christian?" What makes it awful? The fact that it strikes home into the very heart of the theologies and the ecclesiasticisms of the Christian world, and drives down a wedge into our routine notions about religion, so as to tear open a vent through which honest answers, like pent-up waters, must come forth. No abstract propositions, cut and dried, will do now. Why does the mother stammer, and hesitate, and guess, and put the question off, and wish the minister would happen to come in, while the poor child stands waiting with amazement, wondering if he is half heathen and half orphan, and by what strange anathema it is that he is left out there in the raw desert, while his parents, and older brothers and sisters, are housed with the Good Shepherd in his Fold? I am supposing she is a be-

lieving, pious, confessing mother. Shall she say this? — "No, my child, you are not expected to be a Christian till you are grown up," — that tantalizing period to which the child begins to think every delightful and desirable thing on earth is to be indefinitely postponed. "You are not expected to be a Christian till the Kingdom of Heaven has first drifted away off from you, or till you have tried the miserable experiment of living without it. For the present, you are left to the world, the flesh, and the devil, not saved from them: to the vultures of your vices, and the desolation of your unconcern. These be your teachers, and your gods! But you must try to forget them, be as moral as you can, and then, when you are grown up, we will try to convert you, and let Christ be your Saviour, — if it is not too late. Meantime, you must go to the Sunday School, and learn what a noble and beautiful thing that life of faith and holy communion is, which some grown-up people are permitted to live!"

Shall she say this to her child? She dares not. It opens a gap too terrible between this soul, which she loves better than life, and her own heart. Besides, Christ has said, she remembers, "Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven." What hinders, then, that her answer should come out round, and full, and clear? "Yes, my dear child, you are a Christian; born, indeed, in sin; shapen in iniquity within me your sinning mother, daughter of a sinning race; yet born under a promise of God, which says, "The promise is

unto you and your children." There is a covenant which spreads a benign shelter over you; you have been made a partaker of this covenant by your baptism, washing you with water, pledging to you the Spirit, and, so far as God may without your own free choice, incorporating you into Christ's body; thereby, over against the currents and forces of sin coursing and playing through you by your natural birth, are set other forces, holier currents, regenerating activities. For you read in your New Testament, "As many of you as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ." Unless, then, you have renounced your covenant vows and blessings by a faithless and wickedly choosing heart, you are a child of this great salvation. The curse of the primeval Fall is taken off from you. You are not under condemnation. Rejoice in it. Lift up your head and be thankful. But, *but*, consider! There is a question for *you* to answer. *What kind* of a Christian are you? In the fact that you are a Christian lies the power of this other question, and the motive that is to give you the answer to it. What kind of a Christian? A Christian consistent and growing, walking after the Spirit; or a Christian reprobate and backslidden, stumbling after the flesh? A Christian standing, or a Christian falling? A Christian living on the Vine, or withered, and ready to be broken off and cast away? So you are an American, born to the civil privileges of an American; but by an unlawful life you may alienate them all, and go to an American

prison. The Jewish child was born and circumcised an Israelite, and was thereby entitled to the religious privileges of an Israelite; but he might turn to idolatry and die in his sins. You are a Christian, my child. Live, then, as a Christian; resist evil as a Christian; beat down Satan under your feet as a Christian; pray as a Christian; come to your Lord's Supper as a Christian. By personal conversion from your transgressions, make your privilege effectual. For, remember, if you do not, there is nothing to prevent you, Christian in this Church-sense as you are, yet if living for self and sin, from perishing and going to perdition in your sin. Your being a Christian to-day, my child, is the richest of all your blessings, purchased for you by your Saviour's blood. But the covenant is not an insurance policy on your soul. It is not an inheritance inalienable. Unless you take it up and own it, you forfeit it. Come, then! as you have received Christ Jesus, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him, as he in you, and as you have been justified by his death, be saved by his life. "Glorify him in your body and in your spirit, which are his."

This is the answer of Christian parentage to Christian childhood. It defines, I think, the just direction and scope of the Sunday School teaching as respects the Church. And, in so far as the Sunday School has to act on a childhood which is not in covenant relations, still, and everywhere, on every mission-field in a nominal Christen-

dom, or in heathendom, its ministry will be to gather and baptise converts under the same covenant, and to shelter them in the same Fold.

8. For the sake of completeness, consider, eighthly, that *the same doctrine honors the Church, too, by connecting with her, as the visible fountain of spiritual light, all the benefactions that the Sunday School yields*, bringing them under her moulding and fruitful hand, and grafting them, or causing them to grow, on her celestial estate, as a part of her dowry and glory. Even in the mere presence of the little ones in her enclosures, how greatly is her scenery beautified, and her climate softened! The Church should be like a family in the ever-renewed multiplication and fertility of her household; with young and old intermingled, and reciprocally helpful together. Home is never quite so perfect as when there is childhood leaping, and singing, and talking with the angels, in it. And the Church is the home of holy and innocent souls.

9. Consider also, ninthly, that if you thoroughly receive this truth, *you give to the Church, in its maturer members, what she so urgently needs, a distinctively Church-work to do.* For now, how often do you see her, in the persons of the professed disciples, sitting with folded hands, waiting by the wayside, growing weary of ceremonies and dyspeptic upon dogmas, not knowing how to re-animate her languid muscles, and ascribing to some desertion of the Spirit the sadness and deadness of heart gendered only

of her morbid inaction! In the training of her young, and in the rescue of the lambs lost upon the mountains, let her find again her health, her bloom, her energy, and her hope.

The question then no longer is — Why do not the parents do this work? but — Are we fit to do it and determined to do it? If we only dally over it with soft and sentimental trifling, or make a mock at it by a heartless and indifferent formality one hour a week, we but renew the sad disappointment of youthful aspiration at a second point, and cheat the soul again by the double fraud of a false promise and a tuition into insincerity. Our simple business is, the sins of others not hindering us, as ambassadors for Christ, and in Christ's stead, to beseech these little ones to be reconciled to God.

And it will be strange indeed if, as we go from the class to the closet, and from the closet to the class, that searching word of our Lord does not pursue us with its warning: "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven."

10. Finally, — you could not pardon it if this were omitted, — finally, *this interpretation of your work, and this doing of it, will honor and delight the Redeemer himself*, — the Lord and lover of the children, the Great Teacher of the teachers, the watchful Friend of the families, and the Head over all things to his Church. For it will bring all closer to him, where he would that we

should be. It will carry up and extend abroad his mediatorial kingdom. It will attune those voices of praise that he loves to hear, of children in the Temple, "Hosannah to the Son of David." It will make the Gospel more than a name, even a life, and a life unto life. It will add the power of godliness to the form. And His own Church will arise, "built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone:" — "that we, being no more tossed to and fro, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him which is the Head, from whom the whole body, fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the Body, unto the edifying of itself in love."

(Nov., 1891, 20,000)

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